



The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency

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Preventing Unnecessary Placements: Keeping Children Safe at Home

This *Blue Sheet* is devoted to preventing unnecessary placements of children in foster care and strategies for keeping children safe at home. Placement of children in foster care to keep them safe should be a

last resort, not a first consideration. We must ask ourselves, "What would it take for this child to remain at home safely today?" Then we must diligently use the effort and actions necessary to succeed.

First and foremost, children belong with their birth families.

Except in the most egregious situations, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children and communities safe. Family preservation efforts recognize that separating children and youth from their families is traumatic for them, often leaving lasting negative effects. These efforts build upon the conviction that many youth can be safely protected and treated within their own homes when parents are provided with services and supports, and are empowered to improve their lives. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

Iowa Blueprint for Forever Families April 2011

Life of the Case

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Safety First: Supervisors assure the effective implementation of safety intervention through their oversight. *Safety Intervention* refers to all the actions and decisions required throughout the life of a case to: a) assure that an unsafe child is protected; b) expend sufficient efforts necessary to support and facilitate a caregiver's protection of the child; and c) achieve the establishment of a safe, permanent home for the unsafe or conditionally safe child. Safety intervention consists of identifying and assessing threats to child safety; planning and establishing safety plans that assure child safety; managing safety plans that assure child safety; and creating and implementing case plans that enhance the capacity of caregivers to provide protection for their children.¹

¹ A Supervisor's Guide to, Consulting, Developing Worker Competence In Safety Intervention, ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., Holder & Holder

Principles of Preventing Unnecessary Placement of Children in Foster Care

● CRITICAL THINKING AND GOOD JUDGEMENT DECISIONS ● SAFETY ASSESSMENT AND EFFECTIVE SAFETY PLANS ● STRATEGIES AND SERVICES TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE AT HOME ●

Critical Thinking and Good Judgment Decisions: We are required to make reasonable efforts to prevent placement of children in foster care and keep them at home safely. Our thinking and decisions around keeping children safe at home are framed by the concepts of “due diligence” and “least

thinking, and supervisory consultation contribute to appropriate conclusions and making the best decisions given the case circumstances. Whether to place a child or whether action can be taken to keep the child safe at home, requires weighing

unnecessary placements. Undue influences can be biases or attitudes about families or our role with families. These undue influences must be exposed and examined to assure that good judgment follows.

Decisions must be based on a complete set of facts that have a clear connection or logical relationship to the safety of the child and must be accurate and credible. As workers move through the shared decision-making process, they develop carefully reasoned rationale for their decisions, which should be documented and evaluated.

***Prejudicial Influences:** Often, such influences may be subtle yet widespread in nature. A recent Study revealed the powerful influences and pressures that institutions exert on staff that lead to a significant over-representation of children of color in foster care. You can read more about these influences in the following document:*

Race Equity Review: Findings from a Qualitative Analysis of Racial Disproportionality and Disparity for African American Children and Families in Michigan's Child Welfare System.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy, January 2009

intrusive” interventions that effectively control safety.

Good judgment in child welfare cases is built on the foundation of core social work practices. Engagement, assessment, and safety planning provide the essential basis for determining whether a child can be safely maintained in his/her own home, and if so, what actions must be immediately taken to ensure safety. Workers should have confidence that the decisions made are the correct and most appropriate ones given the dynamic circumstances. Analysis of information gathered, critical

the significance and meaning of complex family characteristics, history, behaviors, situations, and factors.

The safety constructs [threats of maltreatment, child vulnerability, and caretaker's protective capacities] provide a way of thinking about child safety, and helps identify the protective parental capacities that may need temporary replacement, development, or rehabilitation.

Lack of engagement with families about how to keep a child safe, inadequate information, poor analysis, and undue influences can result in poor decisions and

Safety Assessments and Effective Safety Plans:

Effective safety plans are considered a mandated reasonable effort to prevent placement of a child in foster care.

Goals of safety assessments, whether completed by a CPS or Case Manager, include:

- assessing safety;
- planning and establishing safety plans that assure child safety;
- managing those safety plans; and
- creating and implementing case recommendations or plans that enhance the capacity of caregivers to provide protection,

"Safety plans are concerned with controlling danger and threats of danger only – not changing family functioning or circumstances."¹ Changing family functioning is a longer term process that is formulated in the case plan.

Safety plans include formal or informal strategies or services that have an immediate effect, are always accessible, and are sufficient to control the danger or threat of danger.² Safety plans must directly address the safety concern. **A sufficient safety plan is a "well thought-out approach containing the most suitable people taking the necessary action frequently enough to control the safety threats and/or substitute for the diminished caregiver protective capacities."**³ Safety planning should be creative and individualized to each family. "Safety plans should never ask nor have caregivers promise to change behavior. If caregivers could change their behavior and situation on their own, CPS would likely never have had to be involved."⁴ Safety interventions should be reviewed and revised to match changing parental capacity and functioning.

At the point that a case is transferred from the assessment worker to the case manager, the case manager must assess the sufficiency of the safety plan to assure that the strategies and interventions are relevant; include responsible and suitable adults; identify necessary actions and necessary level of effort; and are effectively related to safety

¹ Safety Management within Safety Plans 2004 Action for Child Protection, Inc.

² Ibid

³ Immediate Evaluation of the Safety Plan, July 2005 Action for Child Protection, Inc

⁴ Ibid

threats and diminished caregiver protective capacities.⁵

Sometimes it can be a challenge to come up with the resources to meet strategies in a safety plan but often someone within the family network will come to the aid of a family in crisis. Selecting capable adults, and timing and scheduling these resources, to monitor, supervise, help, and support the family becomes very important requiring energy and commitment from staff. Creatively maximizing the involvement of informal family supports can make it possible for children to remain home safely.

Strategies and Services to Keep Children Safe at Home:

Safety strategies should directly relate to the threat of harm⁵:

- Managing the caregiver behavior that threatens the child's safety.
- Managing a family crisis that impedes parental capacity to protect or provide basic care by providing immediate problem solving in order to control the threat to child safety.
- Managing social supports and connections to decrease isolation and increase support.
- Managing access or separation of a child from the danger or the perpetrator to control family stress, caregiver reactions, child-care responsibility and caregiver-child access.
- Managing resource supports refers to controlling shortage of family resources and resource utilization, the absence of which directly threatens child safety.

⁵ Safety Management within Safety Plans 2004 Action for Child Protection, Inc.

Safety checks and supervision activities are a contracted service in Iowa available 24/7, with daily face to face contact with the family, and 2 hour crisis response time. They are designed to provide the intensive monitoring and assistance a family may need to prevent placement of children in foster care. These services provide:

- Regular monitoring and assessment of the Protective Capacities of the caregivers, Child Vulnerabilities, and Threats of Maltreatment to the Child;
- Activities to provide assistance and basic education for families regarding household management skills and capacities related to immediate safety issues when necessary to accomplish a task or activity that is identified in the Safety Plan;
- Activities, or provision of funding, to help children and their family secure necessary concrete supports;
- Activities to arrange for respite care and/or protective child care assistance, if identified in the Safety Plan;
- Activities to monitor and ensure that a parent is keeping their mental health or substance abuse treatment appointments and taking their prescribed psychotropic medication, if appropriate to the Case situation; and
- Activities to inspect and monitor the safety of the home environment.

The case example that follows provides a description of a family and demonstrates the use of safety management through an initial safety plan.

Example of a Safety Plan and Safety Management

Description of the Family and Reason for System Involvement:

The Johnson family consists of young parents, [Brent, age 24], mother, [Melissa, age 22], and three children, [Owen, age 5, Meredith, age 3, and Kevin, age 1]. Meredith, age 3, was returned home by a neighbor, having been found wandering alone in the neighborhood while the mother was absent from the home and the father was intoxicated. When the mother returned home, the parents began fighting and the police were called. While in the home, police discovered a pipe and small amount of crack cocaine accessible to the children. The police called the department. Arrangements were made by the parents for the children to go to the home of the paternal grandmother while the parents were processed by law enforcement. A meeting with the CPS worker was scheduled upon their release, at which time the first safety plan was developed.

Further assessment found that the mother has gone from periodic use of crack cocaine to use almost every weekend. She has used crack since age 16 and has been using crack with her sister. The maternal family cannot be considered a resource without further evaluation. The father does not drink during the week but binge drinks Friday, Saturday and Sundays. When he is drunk, there is aggression against the mother described as intimidation and verbal abuse. Pushing, shoving and physical threats are a recent development. Police report that the 3 year old child was found wandering the neighborhood unsupervised as recently as 2 weekends ago, so this is the second known occurrence of danger to this child.

The parents are willing for services to be provided and will co-operate with the service providers. The paternal grandparents have a good relationship with both parents and are willing to provide support. A paternal aunt is also interested in helping the family.

Safety Concern or Description of the Impending Danger:

Parental substance use diminishes the parent's ability to provide adequate supervision and is a threat to child safety. Marital discord has increased in the last few months, with domestic violence, and has contributed to family stress, decreased family functioning, and decreased ability to problem solve. Due to the age of the children, they are unable to self-supervise or protect themselves from harm.

Tasks to Assure Safety and How Plan is Monitored:

1. Separation from the danger or perpetrator: The grandmother will stay in the home of the children to provide 24/7 supervision; to be evaluated in one week.
2. Immediate substance abuse intervention: Parents will submit to drug testing immediately, attend AA/NA daily, and schedule a substance abuse evaluation. These steps are taken for the parents to maintain sobriety and monitor substance abusing behavior and addiction. This intervention will be evaluated in one week.
3. Supervision and monitoring of caregivers behavior, stress, and circumstances that influence parenting, marital discord, domestic violence, and substance use will occur daily, through Safety Plan Services, to be evaluated in one week. Basic parenting assistance and teaching fundamental parenting skill related to immediate basic care and protection will be provided to the parents. Monitoring of the family stress and further evaluation of parenting needs will be completed. This intervention will be evaluated in one week.
4. Oversight and management weekly by CPS in direct contact with the family and providers.
 - Weekly contact with Melissa and Brent to determine general compliance with the safety plan, discuss supervision and well-being of the children, and to determine potential or actual substance use, domestic violence, or aggression. The children will be interviewed at that time to determine well-being.
 - Weekly contact with grandparents and providers to determine compliance with the safety plan, safety management, and general well-being of the children.

Management of Threats

This safety plan manages the threats by:

- Providing assessment, monitoring and support for the parents to maintain sobriety and to monitor substance abusing behavior and addiction.
- Providing professional assessment, monitoring and addressing family stress that stimulates substance use by the parents and the marital discord.
- Supporting these young parents and providing protective supervision 24/7 by the grandmother.
- Establishing a continuing outside presence that overtly clarifies aggression is to be avoided.
- Assuring routine and constant contact with family members throughout the week and upon weekends.